A SERMON PREACHED

Before the Honourable

House of Commons,

AT

St *Margaret's Westminster*,

On *Wednesday* the 21th of *May*, 1690.

Being the day of the

MONTHLY-FAST.

By JOHN SHARP, D.D. Dean of *Canterbury*, and one of Their Majesties Chaplains.

LONDON,

Printed for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's Head* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard, 1690.

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PREACHED

Before the Honourable

House of Commons,

AT

St Margaret's Westminster,

On Wednesday the 2d of May, 1660.

being the day of the

MONTHLY-FAST.

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Deut. V. xxix.

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my Commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their Children for ever.

THese are the words of God to *Moses* concerning the Children of *Israel*. And two things may be gathered from them.

I. His serious desire of their Happiness.

II. The means whereby this Happiness is to be attained.

The first of these is imported in that so-

lemn *wish* into which the Text is framed: *O that there were such an heart in them, &c. that it might be well with them, and with their Children for ever.*

The second is imported in the way of connecting the former part of the wish with that which follows: *O that there were such an heart in them*, what then? *that they would fear me, and keep all my Commandments always*, and why so? It follows, *That it might be well with them, and with their Children for ever.* Which plainly implies, That the way to have things well with them, and with their Children, is to fear God, and keep all his Commandments always.

I have but one thing more to observe concerning the Text, and that is this: That the wish or desire that God here expresses of *Israel's Vertue* and *Happiness*, doth not so much relate to the *Israelites*, considered *singly*, and as *particular* Persons, (though it cannot be denied, but it doth extend to them, even under that notion) but it chiefly relates to the Children of Israel considered *collectively*, that is to say, under the notion of a *People* or *Nation*. God here expresses his care of the whole Nation, and seriously wishes they may be a happy

People, they and their Children after them.

Two points then we have from this Text very proper to be insisted on upon this occasion, which therefore I shall make the Heads of my following Discourse.

First, *That God is seriously concerned for the good and happiness of Nations and Kingdoms, as well as that of particular Persons; and more especially of those Nations that profess his true Religion.*

Secondly, *That the Happiness and Prosperity of Nations is to be attained the same way that any particular Man's happiness is,* that is to say, *by fearing God and keeping his Commandments.*

I. I begin with the first, *That God is seriously concerned for the good and happiness of Nations and Kingdoms, as well as that of particular Persons; and more especially of those Nations that profess his true Religion.*

I do not think this is much doubted of by any Christian, and therefore I need not insist on a laborious proof of it.

That God who doth not overlook the meanest and the most inconsiderable Creatures that he hath made; but so far concerns himself in taking care of them, and providing for them, that not so much as a *Sparrow* (if we may believe our Saviour) *doth fall to the ground without*

his

his will: Can it be imagined, that he is not more concerned for the happiness and well being of the noblest part of the visible Creation, *Mankind* who bear his own Image, and whom he looks upon as his own Children? Certainly he is.

And that God whose Care and Providence doth so particularly extend to every individual Man, that (as the same our Lord Jesus speaks) *the very hairs of our head are numbered by him*. Can it be imagined, that he doth not still take more care of the greater Bodies and Combinations of Men, such as Nations and Kingdoms, which are so many ways more considerable than single Men, and in whose Fortunes the good or ill of particular Persons is so wholly bound up? Certainly he doth.

And lastly, That God who is the Author, the Preserver, the Protector of all publick Societies; *by whom Kings Reign, and Magistrates decree Justice*: Can it be imagined that he hath not still a more particular regard to those Nations that he hath been pleased to call by his own Name, and hath chosen for his own People (such as were the *Israelites* in my Text, of old; and such are all those Peoples and Nations now that do profess his true Religion)? Certainly he hath.

Thus

Thus natural reaſon will teach us to argue. And that it is a right way of arguing, is confirmed to us by our Saviour and St. *Paul*, both of which we find reaſoning after this manner. Mat. 6. 26. 30. 1 Cor. 9. 9.

To quote to you all that the Scripture ſaith upon this Argument, would be endleſs. One of the great deſigns of God's word, is to poſſeſs us with a hearty Belief, that God, as he is the Creator, ſo is he alſo the Governour of the World. And that his Providence extends to all the Things and Perſons in it. And that the conſtant rule and meaſure of that Providence, is no other than the good of the World, and the good of every perſon in it, ſo far as his private good is conſiſtent with the publick. And that therefore as God deſigns all good to every particular Man, ſo doth he more eſpecially deſign the good of Nations and Kingdoms in all his diſpenſations of Providence to them. Nor is there any thing happens in any Nation or Kingdom but with his approbation. Even the ſevereſt viſitations that come upon Mankind are from him. *There is no evil happens to a City, but the Lord hath done it.* Though yet *Judgment is his ſtrange work.* And *Mercy and loving kindneſs is the thing wherein he delights. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men.* But Amos 3. 6. Iſ. 28. 21. Mic. 7. 18. Lam. 3. 33.

ſometimes it is neceſſary that Nations ſhould be ſcourged; yet even, that is, for the grea-
Iſ. 26. 9. ter good of Mankind. *That* thus *when God's Judgments are in the earth, the Inhabitants of the World may learn righteouſneſs.*

But then as for his own People, thoſe upon whom his name is called, thoſe that are in Covenant with him, and profeſs his true Religion; for them upon all occaſions he declares ſo great a tenderneſs and concernment; that there is hardly any figure of ſpeech that the moſt ſenſible Man can make uſe of, for the expreſſing his moſt paſſionate love to his deareſt Friend or Relation, though it be his Wife or his Children, but the very ſame figures are made uſe of by the holy inſpired Writers to ſet out to us the kindneſs and concernment that God hath for his own People. He is their *God*, their *King*, their *Shepherd*, their *Father*, their *Husband*. They are his *choſen ones*. His *delight*, his *peculiar Treaſure*. *He rejoiceth over them to do them good. His bowels earn, his heart is turned within him, his repentings are kindled together*, when through their miſcarriages he is forced to paſs any ſevere Sentence upon them. All this is the language of God in Scripture, when he ſpeaks of his People, and therefore we cannot doubt of

of his sincere affection to them, and particular care of them.

All the doubt is, whether these expressions ought to be applied to any other people than the Jews, with respect to whom the Scripture useth them. But we that believe the Gospel need not make much doubt of it. For it is certain, the reason of all these expressions of kindness to the Jews more than to other Nations, was founded in this; that they were the People whom God had chosen to plant his Church among. They were the People where his Religion was owned. But now it is evident to all Christians, that after our Saviour came into the World, and Preached his Gospel to all Nations, the Jews, as a *Nation*, ceased to be God's Church, or peculiar People; and from that time all those Nations that embraced Christ's Religion, came into their place, and were from thence forward to be as dear to God, and as much his *Care* and his *Treasure*, as ever the Jews were. And upon that account, we of this Nation, may with as much reason, apply the expressions of Scripture to our selves, which declare God's kindness and concernment for his People, as ever the Jews did.

Especially, considering that God has owned

us of this Nation for his People, in as remarkable a manner as any Nation in Christendom. As appears not only from that glorious light of the Gospel, which he has for many years blessed us with, above any other people perhaps in the Christian World: But also from the wonderful Providences, by which he has from time to time preserved our Church, and with it the true Religion among us, notwithstanding the various attempts of our Enemies to subvert it. O may these Mercies of God to our Nation never be forgotten, and may we always remember them with that due thankfullness they call for at our hands.

And thus much of our first head. I beg leave to draw a practical Inference or two from what hath been said, before I proceed to the other.

First, Since it appears, that God sits at the Helm, and steers and manages all the affairs of Mankind; and that publick Societies are more especially the objects of his Care and Providence: Methinks this consideration should be a good Antidote against all those troublesome Fears and Sollicitude, we are apt to disturb our selves with, about the success of publick matters.

If

If indeed all things went in the World by Chance or Fate, and there was no God that did superintend human affairs; I should think it very natural for Men to be extreamly concerned at every piece of ill news they heard. It might be allowed them to break their sleep in the night, and to complain dismally in the day of the sad times that were coming upon us. But since we are certain, as much as we are certain that there is a God, and as much as we are certain that the Scripture is true; that all our affairs, our publick as well as our private affairs; the affairs both in Church and State, are entirely in God Almighty's disposal, and that *He* doth really manage and order all things among us; and likewise so manageth them, that all shall at last turn to the good of his People, and to the good of every honest Man: I say, since we are, or may be satisfied, that our Business is in so good hands, I must confess I do not see what reason people have, to give themselves so much trouble and uneasiness, about things that may, or may not come.

Thus far indeed, it is fit that every one should be concerned; nay it is fit that every one should charge his Conscience with it: Namely,

Namely to do his duty to the publick in his place and ſtation; to contribute all that is in his power towards the procuring and promoting the common Happineſs; and to endeavour all that in him lies, towards the averting thoſe Judgments we have reaſon to fear. But when a Man hath done this, to what purpoſe is it for him to trouble himſelf any further? I ſhould think he had better follow our Saviour's advice, which when all things are conſidered, will be found Eternally Prudent and Reaſonable: *Take no thought for to morrow: let the morrow take care for the things of it ſelf: ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

Mat. 6. 34.

Secondly, This Doctrine ought to teach us this farther Leſſon; to depend altogether upon God Almighty, and upon him only, for the good ſucceſs of our Affairs, either in Church or State, whenever they are in a doubtful or dangerous condition. For *though many are the devices in the hearts of men; nevertheleſs the counſel of the Lord that ſhall ſtand.* It is in vain to truſt to human means: For be our ſtrength never ſo great; or be thoſe that manage for us never ſo induſtrious; or be our hearts never ſo much united: Yet it is an eaſy matter for God to blaſt all our deſigns, and to diſappoint

Prov. 19. 21.

diſappoint all our Counſels in a moment.

He hath often done ſo, where Men have been confident in their own ſtrength. In one nights time he made that prodigious Army of the *Aſſyrians*, that came up againſt *Jeruſalem*, and thought themſelves ſure of taking it; to decamp and fly back into their own Country, leaving a hundred and fourſcore thouſand of their number, dead upon the place. 2 Kings 19. 34.

There is in truth no truſting to an *arm of Fleſh*. For the ſucceſſes of War depend upon a thouſand Contingencies, which it is not in the power of morral Men, either to foreſee, or remedy. So that *the race is not always to the ſwift, nor the Battel to the ſtrong; nor can a King be ſav'd by the multitude of an Hoſt, nor any mighty Man be delivered by his much ſtrength.* But the *God of Heaven that ruleth in the Kingdoms of Men*; it is He that preſerves or deſtroys; that gives Victory, or ſends a Defeat, as it pleaſeth him. And therefore he is, by way of eminence, ſtiled, *The Lord of Hoſts*, the God of Battels. Eccleſ. 9. 11. Pſ. 33. 16.

On the other hand, If our affairs at any time be in ſo very bad a poſture, that we cannot avoid the having a melancholy diſmal proſpect of things; yet let us not be diſcouraged, let us ſtill truſt in God; let us do what belongs

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to us to do for the obtaining his Mercy and Favour, and then refer the Event to him. God hath certainly a kindness for his People, and if we do our parts towards the preserving his Affection to us, we may still hope he will continue to be our Saviour and Deliverer.

It is as easy to God *to save by few as by many.* The Walls of *Jericho*, at his Command, fell down flat, only at the sound of Rams-Horns. And when the City of *Samaria* was Besieged, and brought into the greatest extremity that was possible, so that Women even ate their own Children: yet in one night, God by an unaccountable terrour, which he struck into the hearts of the Enemies, raised the Siege. And such plenty was left in their Camp, that every one of the Besieged had wherewith, not only to satisfy his hunger, but to enrich himself. Only that Nobleman that would not believe this when it was foretold by the Prophet, did not live to tast of the Fruits of God Almighty's Victory, being trodden to death in the Crowd.

Josh. 6. 20.

2 Kings 7. ch.

II. But it is time to come to the second general point I observed from this Text; *viz. That the Happiness and Prosperity of Nations, is to be attained the same way that any particular Man's happiness*

happineſs is; that is to ſay, *by being ſincerely virtuous and religious*; or, as my Text expreſſes it, *by fearing God, and keeping all his Commandments always.*

This is a true Propoſition, both with reſpect to particular Perſons and to Nations too; but with this difference, That if we take Happineſs and Proſperity for that which the World accounts ſo, that is to ſay, the poſſeſſion of a great many outward Bleſſings, and the freedom from temporal evils and inconveniencies; the Propoſition is not ſo univerſally true with reference to *particular Perſons*, as it is with reference to *Nations* and *Kingdoms*. For every Man that fears God is not always bleſſed with happy outward Circumſtances. On the contrary, ſome good Men are expoſed to many and great Afflictions, and Misfortunes, and Sickneſſes, and Croſſes, all their lives long. But it is certainly true of all *Nations* and *Peoples* whatſoever. Every Nation or Society ſhall fare better or worſe in this World, exactly, according as they fear God, or deſpiſe and affront him; exactly, according to the degree they keep God's Commandments, or break them. Though it is not certain, that every particular Man ſhall always do ſo. And

there is great reaſon that it ſhould be thus. For

Firſt, We know that all God's ways are juſt and equal. Now as to *particular Perſons*, there is a great room left for the diſpenſing this Juſtice and Equity to them. For they being in their natures made to live for ever, it is enough for the vindicating God's Juſtice, that they be at any time hereafter, either rewarded for their Piety and Virtue, or puniſhed for their Wickedneſs and abuſe of God's Mercies. So that wicked Men may be happy and proſperous here, and good Men may ſuffer many afflictions and tribulations, without any the leaſt reflection on the Juſtice or Goodneſs of the great Governour of the World: Becauſe there is a farther day reſerved for the adjuſting all Mens Rewards according to their Works.

But now the conſideration of publick *Societies* and *Nations*, is quite different. Nations are not made to be Immortal, but end with this World. No Society, as a Society, ſhall be called to a future account. But all the Rewards and Puniſhments, they are capable of as Societies, muſt be adjudged and diſtributed to them in this preſent Life. And therefore if we ſuppoſe God to be the Judge and Governour

Governour of the World, and of all the Nations in it; as well as he is the Judge and Governour of particular Perſons: We muſt likewiſe ſuppoſe, that he adminiſters all affairs ſo, that Righteous and Religious Nations have in this World the reward of their Virtue in the bleſſings of Peace and Plenty, and all manner of temporal Proſperity: And on the other ſide, impious and incorrigible Nations are likewiſe puniſhed in this World for their wickedneſs, either by ſevere Judgments, or by a total deſtruction; as God in his infinite Wiſdom ſees cauſe.

This now that I have offered is I think ſo reaſonable, that if there was no more to be ſaid, it ought to go a great way towards the making of the point I have in hand highly credible. But in the *ſecond* place there is a great deal more to be ſaid. The word of God doth all along bear teſtimony to the truth of this. A multitude of Texts of Scripture there are, that do moſt plainly give this account of God's dealing with Nations and Peoples, that I have now mentioned.

There is no Judgment threatned to any Nation in the holy Scripture (and abundance of Nations are there threatned) but it is upon

account of the ſins and wickedneſs they were guilty of. Which ſins, if they repented of, ſo repented as to forſake them, they might find mercy.

And accordingly we find in fact, that God always dealt with Peoples and Nations according to theſe meaſures. God had ſolemnly denounced deſtruction to the City of *Ninive*, by his Prophet, and that within forty days. But upon the Repentance of the *Ninevites*, and turning to God with all their hearts, he reverſed his Sentence (though to the great diſcontent of the Prophet) and gave them a further time.

On the other ſide he waited long for the Repentance of the *Canaanites*, but would not deſtroy them; becauſe their ſins, though very hainous, admitted a place for Repentance. But when their iniquities were filled up to the meaſures, according to which God proceeds in his deſtruction of Nations; He then ſent the *Iſraelites* to root them out, and to take poſſeſſion of their Land.

And thus was *Nebuchadnezzar* raiſed up by God to be a ſcourge to all the Nations about him, for the puniſhment of their ſins. *Nebuchadnezzar* had indeed other things in his head.

That

That which he designed was, the gratifying his own Ambition, and enlarging his Dominions. But these were not the ends which God had to serve by him. God made use of him as his Instrument, as his Servant (and so he calls him) for the rendring to the Nations that just recompence of vengeance which their sins called for.

I mention these things the rather, because they are instances of God's dealing with Heathen Nations, who were under no particular Covenant with God.

And I might have recourse likewise to the Histories of all Nations, to shew the truth of this. Name any Nation that was ever remarkable for Justice; for Temperance, and severity of Manners; for Piety and Religion (though it was in a wrong way); that did not always thrive and grow great in the World; and that did not always enjoy a plentiful portion of all those things which are accounted to makea NationHappy and Flourishing. And on the other side, when that Nation has declined from its former Virtue, and grown impious or dissolute in manners, we appeal to Experience, whether it has not likewise always proportionably sunk in its Success and good Fortunes. I

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am ſure any one that will be at the pains to read either the *Greek*, or the *Roman*, or even the *Turkiſh* Hiſtory, will meet with matter enough there, to ſatisfy him of the truth of this obſervation.

But I confine my ſelf to the Scripture, and in that the Hiſtory of the *Jews* is the moſt remarkable, for indeed it makes up a great part of the Old Teſtament. Now in that Hiſtory it is worth our taking notice of; That every degree of publick Vice, and departure from God's Laws, was always puniſhed with publick Judgments. And on the other ſide, every degree of publick Repentance and Reformation, was always rewarded with publick Happineſs and Proſperity. So that any one that could make a right eſtimate of the Morals of that Nation, and how it ſtood as to Virtue and Vice; might conſtantly make a judgment likewiſe how it would fare with them, as to their outward temporal affairs.

I muſt confeſs that generally ſpeaking, there is little force in thoſe Arguments that are drawn from Examples; But in the caſe I am now upon, I think there is a great weight in them. For though we cannot argue from God's dealing with one Perſon, that he will juſt deal

deal in the ſame manner with another: Yet as to Nations and Kingdoms, the caſe is otherwiſe, as I before ſaid. For God's diſpenſations and Providences to them, ſeem all to proceed upon one immutable Foundation (which will be the ſame in all Ages and Countreys) namely the expreſſion and vindication of his Juſtice and Goodneſs in this World.

And for my part, I have always been of this mind, That there is no other difference between the Hiſtory of God's dealings with his own People the Jews, and that of other Nations, but this: That in other Nations the publick Events that happen'd, whether good or bad, though they were taken notice of, yet they paſſed without any reflection on the true cauſes from whence they proceeded. The Hiſtorians did indeed often lay their Fingers rightly upon the immediate, viſible, outward occaſions, or means, or inſtruments, from whence their good or bad Fortune was derived to them. But they ſearched no further. They conſidered only ſecond Cauſes, and took no great notice of the firſt and principal Cauſe of all things, God Almighty, and his influencing humane affairs. They left God in a great meaſure out of their Hypotheſis, and out of

their

their Hiſtory. But now that the World might be awaken'd to a more hearty belief and ſenſe of his Providence, God took care to ſingle out the Nation of the Jews; and in them to give us a true Pattern or Platform of his dealings with all the Nations of the World. And for that purpoſe he ordered, that all the great ſtrokes, both of their departure from God, and of their return to him; And likewiſe both of the good or bad Fortune, that did at any time befal that Nation, ſhould be faithfully Regiſtred, and the true Cauſes of them faithfully aſſigned; That all Mankind might from thence receive Inſtruction how they ought to behave themſelves towards God; and what according to their different behaviours they were to expect.

To conclude this point: By all that hath been ſaid it appears, That the State, and Condition, and Fortune of all Kingdoms and Nations, is the very ſame with that of the Jews, as it is repreſented by *Achior* the *Ammonite*, in the advice he gave to *Holofernes*, when he came up with an Army againſt that People. You have the paſſage in *Judith* 5. 17. *Whilſt* (ſaith he) *theſe People ſinned not before their God, they proſpered; becauſe the God that hateth iniquity, was with*

with them. But when they departed from the way that he appointed them, they were destroyed in many Battels, after a wonderful sort, and were led Captives into a land that was not theirs. But now they are turned to their God, and are come up from their Captivity, and have again possessed Jerusalem. *Now therefore my Lord and Governour, if there be any fault in this People, so that they have sinned against their God, let us consider that this shall be their ruin, and let us go up that we may overcome them. But if there be no iniquity in this People, let my Lord pass by, lest their Lord defend them, and their God be for them, and we become a reproach before all the World.*

Thus it is, and will be always with all States and Nations, if they notoriously sin against their God, this will be their ruin. But if there be not found iniquity in them, it is in vain for any Enemy to set upon them; for God will be for them, and their Lord will defend them.

If this which I have said be not sufficient to satisfy any one about the truth of this point; I might bring other Proofs for it. I might for instance in the *third* place insist upon this, That Virtue and Piety do in their own nature tend to promote the welfare and happiness of Peoples and Nations. As on the other hand,

all Vice and Irreligion, is destructive of humane Society. And this without respect to any appointment or Decree of God, that things should be managed in this way; but purely in the very nature of the thing.

It is obvious, That Virtue and Religion lay the surest Foundation for all those Blessings wherein the happiness of a Nation doth consist, that is possible; both by making Magistrates to govern well, and by rendring the People easy to be governed. And likewise by furnishing both the Governours and the governed, with such kind of Principles and Habits, as cannot fail with the Blessing of God to produce both Peace, and Plenty, and Victory, and all other sorts of Prosperity in a Nation.

As on the other hand, all Vice, and Wickedness, and Profaneness, and Impiety, do sow the worst Seeds in the World for the dissolving and breaking in pieces all Societies; or at least, for the so enfeebling them, that they shall either be in a very low wretched condition among themselves, if they have no Enemies; or if they have any, become an easy prey to the next Invader.

But I will not enter upon this Argument, because I think the matter needs no further proof.

proof. And I would ſpend the reſt of my time, in making ſome Application of what hath been ſaid upon this point, to the buſineſs of our preſent meeting on this day.

WE are here met together for the ſolemn Humiliation of our ſelves with *Faſting* and *Prayer*, before Almighty God: In order to the Supplicating his Divine Majeſty for the Pardon of our Sins, and the Sins of our Nation; And the imploring his Bleſſing and Protection to the King and Kingdom, by continuing thoſe Mercies to us we do enjoy; by averting thoſe Judgments from us we have reaſon to fear; and more particularly by giving a Happy Iſſue to that dangerous War in which his Majeſty, with the Kingdom, is now engaged.

And very great reaſon there is, that you the *Repreſentatives* of the People of *England*, ſhould moſt ſeriouſly, and ſolemnly, join in this Religious Office; ſince the Fortunes of the Nation you repreſent, did never more lie at ſtake than at this preſent.

You have hitherto been acting and endeavouring for the Happineſs and Security of your Nation by *Humane* Methods, and we all put

up our daily Prayers, that what you have done, and what you shall do, may be *for the Glory of God, and the good of his Church; and the Safety, Honour and Wellfare of their Majesties, and their Kingdoms.* And we hope all will so come to pass.

But now on this day, both *You* and *We*, are to think of other Methods, for the procuring Success to our Affairs. Namely, by having recourse to God Almighty; who when we have done all that we can, is the Governour of the World, and will do what he pleaseth. But yet will always do that which is best for Mankind, and that too which is best for our Nation, if we be capable objects of his Favour. And to make our selves such, if it be possible, is our Business on this Day.

This is indeed a seasonable Business at all times; but at this time it seems absolutely necessary. Since we have reason to apprehend the *Crisis* of our Nation, as to *Happiness* or *Ruin*, to be upon the point of approaching.

The Judgments of God are now abroad in the World. We have not only Rumours of Wars sounding in our Ears, but all *Europe* is now in an actual War, and a terrible one. And what the Consequences will be we know not.

Some

Some very great thing God certainly designs to bring to pass in these parts of the World, and that very suddenly. A Cup he has mingled for all the Nations to drink of. Which to some undoubtedly will prove a bitter Potion, a *Cup* of God's *Wrath* and *Fury*; to others probably a *Cup of Salvation*. But how it will prove to us, is yet entirely in the Will of God. However this is certain, that we of this Nation shall have as much our share in it, be it good or bad, as any other in Christendome.

And now after the mention of this, Can there be any need to call upon any one to *weeping* and *fasting*, and *mourning*, and *crying mightily to the Lord, that he would have mercy upon us, and spare us*, and our Nation, and *not give his Heritage over to Confusion*. Why methinks the Circumstances we are in, should put us upon so doing, without any other Monitors. Indeed we have no Humanity, no Compassion for our selves or our Country, if we do not.

We should all be of this mind if we did seriously consider how things stand with us.

We are not that Innocent, Virtuous, Pious People, that may certainly reckon upon God's Favour,

Favour, and think our ſelves in all Caſes ſure of his Protection. For if the Doctrine I have now been inſiſting on to you, be true Doctrine; then we of this Nation can but entertain very ſmall hopes of being Happy and Proſperous. Nay, we cannot but apprehend Miſery and Ruin, and Deſolation to our ſelves; unleſs God be abundantly more merciful to us than we deſerve. And there can be no way to prevail with him to be ſo, but an univerſal *Humiliation* and *Repentance*. And this is the Application I deſire to make of the Point I have been now treating of.

If the meaſure of God's dealing with Nations be always according to the *Moral* State of them. If their *good Fortunes* be dealt out to them according to their *Virtues*; and *Judgments* be inflicted upon them, according to their provoking God by their *Sins*; as we have ſaid: Good Lord! What a lamentable Proſpect have we of this Kingdom of what may come upon us? And what infinite reaſon have we thereupon, immediately to try all the ways that are poſſible of making our Peace with God, that ſo *Iniquity may not be our ruin.*

I beg leave to dwell a little upon this Point, becauſe it is the proper Argument of the day.

I do not say, nor do I think, that we of this Nation are worse than our Neighbours. But this I say, considering how long God hath spared us, and how long we have enjoyed the Blessings of Peace and Plenty, and all sorts of Prosperity (though perhaps with many Fears and just Apprehensions of danger); whilst most of our Neighbours have been harassed with Wars, and exposed to all the Cruelties and Miseries of Persecutions and Devastations: And considering the great Priviledges and Advantages we have for many years enjoyed, of all the outward *means* of *Grace*, that could be desired for the Eternal Salvation of our Souls, and that above any other Nation under Heaven; And withal, how unprofitable we have been under these *means*, how unthankful to God for them, and what little effect they have had upon us for the bettering our Manners. And lastly, Considering how very wicked we generally are, what a World of open gross Sins and Impieties do reign among us, and what a lewd, Profane, Hypocritical, Atheistical Spirit seems to have gone out into the Nation, and to prevail upon it. I say, these things considered, we cannot make any very comfortable Reflections on our own Condition.

tion. So far from that, that if (as I said) the measure of God's dealings with Nations be taken from their Behaviours and moral Qualities, and be suited to their merits and deserts; we have as little to hope for as most Nations under Heaven.

I take no delight in saying these things; on the contrary it is very grievous: But if ever one may be allowed to run out into a *Declamation* against the *Vices* of the *Times*, it is upon such an occasion as this, and before such an Audience as this, that the liberty may be challenged.

For God's sake let us not deceive our selves; nor think that we are the Favourites of Heaven, meerly because we profess the *Best Religion*, and are Members of the *Best Church* in the World.

For as good as our Church and Religion is, and as zealous as we seem to be for them; yet never did *Vice* and *Iniquity* of all sorts, and indeed every thing that is contrary to our holy Religion, more abound in this Nation than at this day.

Give me leave to speak out upon this occasion, and to tell you of some of the *Crying Sins* that reign among us, and that deserve *Your Care*

to

to put a stop to; and which, if they be continued in, will certainly bring down the Vengeance of God upon us.

Where was there ever more *Atheism* and *Infidelity* to be seen in a Country that professed the Religion of Jesus Christ, than is among us at this day?

We do not perhaps meet with very many that do openly affirm, *There is no God*: For as bad as we are, God be thanked we are not yet arrived to such Impudence. That is such an affront to the *Laws* and to all *good Manners*, that it is not to be born with. But we may meet with several, every day, that do affirm the same thing by consequence; asserting such Principles from whence it may be necessarily concluded.

For my part, I account it much the same thing, as to the ill effects of the Opinion, to deny the Being of *God*; as to deny the Being of *Angels*, and *Spirits*, and *Immaterial Souls*; to deny the Being of *particular Providence*; to deny the natural difference between *good* and *evil*; to deny another Life after this, wherein good Men shall be rewarded, and wicked Men punished; to deny the liberty of *Humane Actions*, and to say, that all things which we do, we

do by a fatal neceſſity, and we cannot do otherwiſe: And yet we may every day meet with Men of theſe Principles, nay, and that laugh at all thoſe that maintain the contrary.

But then, as for the buſineſs of *Jeſus Chriſt*, and that which we call the Chriſtian Religion, what a very little do a great many among us make of that? To talk of Chriſt's being ſent for the Saviour of the World, and that he died to procure the Pardon of our Sins, and that we muſt believe all the Scripture-Doctrines concerning him, and worſhip him as a God; why what *ſtuff* is this to a great many of the refined Spirits of our Age? It is very well if they can ſo far prevail with themſelves, as to own the Being of God, and to acknowledge their obligation to the Duties of moral Honeſty and Juſtice, which *natural* Religion teacheth; But as for *Jeſus Chriſt* and the *Trinity*, and the *Sacraments*, and all *revealed* Religion; they beg your Pardon for theſe things, they are too nice and ſubtil for them to meddle with. Not but that they are good Chriſtians all the while. For they can come to our Churches, and to our Sacraments too, if there be occaſion. Becauſe indeed they will always be of the Religion

gion of the Country where they live. But at the same time they do this; they do no more really believe, or expect any Spiritual Benefit in our Religion, nor look for any more *Salvation* from *Christ Jesus*, than they would expect from *Mahomet*, if they should live in *Turky*.

But this is not all. Even among those that do believe in Jesus Christ, and own his Religion; yet what little regard have they, generally speaking, to his Worship and Service.

It is very well if they now and then afford their presence on *Sundays* at the publick Religious Assemblies. I will not examine with what designs, and for what ends they come thither, nor how devoutly and religiously their hearts are affected during the time they are there. I say it is very well that they are there at all.

But even of those that do come thither, and do once a Week seem to have a sense of publick Religion, I say how few are there of them that take any care of worshipping God, either in their *Families*, or in their *Closets*?

Why, if a Man was truly Religious, he could not pass a day without solemn Addres-

ſes to his *Maker*, and to his *Redeemer*. He would pray in his Cloſet conſtantly; and if he had a Family, he would pray with them conſtantly. And if he had no Family, he would conſtantly reſort to thoſe places where he might pay his Tribute of publick Prayer and Praiſes to God, unleſs he had urgent buſineſs to hinder him.

But, is there any thing of this to be ſeen among us, except in ſome few perſons here and there? Are there not twenty Families for one that live without ſo much as the ſhew of any Devotion? Without any ſort of Prayer or Worſhip of God in their Houſes? Nay, and I am afraid, I may ſay, there are twenty for one, even of private Perſons, that live without Devotion in their Cloſets; that never call upon God, never renew their vows to their Saviour, never pay him any Homage, except perhaps once a Week in a formal way, when the Cuſtom of the Country obliges them to reſort to the Church.

The truth is, ſo little ſenſe have moſt of us of Religion and Devotion; ſo little regard of our Duty to God, and our dependance upon him, and expreſſing that dependance, either in private, or in our Families: That were it

not

not for that *Happy* Institution of the *Lord's day*, on the which we are obliged, by the Laws of God and Man, to meet together for the Worship of God; we should hardly see any Face of Religion among us, and in a little time should scarce be distinguished from Heathens.

But yet this is not the worst of our Case. Our gross *Immoralities*; that Horrid *Lewdness* and *Debauchery* that is every where to be observed in our days, doth still increase our Guilt, and cry to Heaven for Judgment upon our Nation.

It would make a Man's heart ake, that has any sense of God or Religion, to think of the *Riots*, the *Drunkenness*, the continued course of spending our time, and our Parts, and our substance, in *Revelling* and *Gaming*, and all manner of such excesses that is daily practised among us. And yet at the same time, the Men that thus live, think themselves very honest Men all the while.

It would really amaze a Man, and put him upon admiring God's Patience, that he doth not presently confound the World, if he did seriously reflect on the many *filthy*, *lewd* Speeches and Actions; the numerous wicked intrigues of *Lust*, the Infamous *Whoredoms* and *Adulteries* that are, without any sense of shame, daily

carried

carried on and acted among us, and that by Perſons too that have the Face to ſhew themſelves at our Holy Aſſemblies.

Eſpecially, if to theſe be added, the infinite *Lies*, and *Cheats*, and *Perjuries*, which our Land groans under. The Blaſphemous *Oaths* and *Imprecations*, the *Damn me's* and *Sink me's*; the Horrid Profanations of the Name of God, and all things Sacred, that are in every place, in every ſtreet where we paſs, belched out, in contempt of the *Almighty* and his Laws; by all ſorts of *Perſons*, of all ſorts of *Qualities*; from the *Beggar* in the ſtreet to the *Man* of *Honour*, and that for no other reaſon in the World, but becauſe it is their Humour or their Cuſtom.

And laſtly, to fill up the meaſure of our iniquities; to our other reigning Vices, we have added that of *Hypocriſy* too; which one would think ſhould not often be found among ſo much *Profaneneſs*.

How many of us make a mighty noiſe with *Religion*, and are Zealous even to *Bigottry*, in the defence of it, and yet have not one grane of inward ſenſe of what it obligeth them to. Nay ſo far from that that if *Religion* be but in their mouths: If they do but appear Zealous enough for the *Proteſtant Cauſe*; If they can but

cry

cry loud enough, *The Temple of the Lord, The Temple of the Lord*, as the Jews did in the Prophet; They matter not, how contradictory their Actions are to the Precepts of that Religion they do profess. Their Zeal for so good a Cause, will sanctify all their other Actions, be they never so wicked and unjust.

But if this be not *Hypocrisy*, there is no such thing in the World. Sure I am, it was this sort of Carriage, that God so often reproves the Jews for, by his Prophets; and upon account of which they are so often reproached as a Generation of *Hypocrites*, and for which he threatens them with utter destruction.

O my Brethren, what have we to say to these things? If the Case be thus with us, as I am afraid it is; What Plea have we to put in for our selves? If God should let loose our Enemies upon us, the Enemies of our *Nation*, and of our *Religion*, and should give us over as a Prey unto them, what have we to reply? Truly nothing that I know of, except that of the Psalmist, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and Just are thy Judgments.*

But we trust God's Lenity, and Forbearance, and Mercy, is as great to *Publick Societies* and *Kingdoms*, as it is to *Private Persons*; And, that

that we may apply thoſe expreſſions to our Nation which *David* uttered, with reference to himſelf: *O Lord, if thou ſhouldſt be extream to mark what is done amiſs, O Lord, who may abide it? But there is Mercy with thee, that thou mayeſt be feared.*

When the Iniquities of a People are at the full, God will not fail to puniſh them. But whether ours be ſo or no, He only knows. We hope, though they be very *grievous* and *crying*, they have not yet exceeded the meaſure of God's Patience; and that there is yet left a place for Repentance. This is indeed the only *Plank* we have to truſt to, that can ſave us from *Shipwrack*; and therefore we ought to lay hold upon it.

Let us therefore this day, every one of us; If we have any kindneſs for our Native Country: If we have any reſpect to that dear Place, where we and our Anceſtors, and all our Relations and Kindred for many Generations have lived ſo happily:

If we have any Zeal for, or regard to that excellent *Church*, and that Holy *Religion*, that God did in ſo extraordinary a manner plant among us; and for the preſerving of which in our Land, His Care and Providence hath ſo often and ſo wonderfully appear'd: If

If we have any Concernment for many thousands of innocent Souls, who without their own fault may deeply suffer for the Nations Sins:

Lastly, If we have any Bowels of Compassion to those dear Children of ours, that God hath given us, that we may transmit to them and their Children after them, that *Birth-right*, and those *Priviledges*, and that excellent *Religion* we received from our Fathers:

I say, if we have any sense of these things, let every one of us this day, most sincerely apply our selves to the Service of God, in all the ways of a serious Virtue and Piety. Or if we have been careless of this matter heretofore; or which is worse, have been lewd or wicked in our lives; yet let us now at last heartily repent of it. And with *Prayers* and *Tears*, and the most solemn *Resolutions* of *Amendment*, prostrate our selves before the Throne of Grace; imploring and beseeching God's Pardon and Forgiveness, and, if it be possible, *a lengthening of our Tranquillity*.

O let us not refuse this Opportunity of doing the greatest Kindness, and the best service to our Country, that we possibly can. And therefore let us not only heartily bewail our own

Sins, but the reigning Impieties and Wickedneſs, that our Nation ſtands accountable for.

Now is the time, if ever, that we are all concerned to be importunate with God for our ſelves and our Country.

And a fitter *Prayer* for this purpoſe cannot be compoſed for us, than that which *Daniel* put up to God for his Nation, and that at ſuch a ſolemn time as this, when, as he tells us, he had *ſet himſelf to ſeek God, for his People, by Prayer and Supplication, with Faſting, and Sackcloth and aſhes.*

The Prayer is in the 9th Chapter of his Prophecy; and I ſhall conclude with it, and I earneſtly beg of you all, to join with me in it.

O Lord the great and dreadful God, that keepeſt the Covenant, and ſheweſt mercy to them that love thee, and to them that keep thy Commandments.

We have ſinned and done wickedly, and have committed Iniquity, and have rebelled; even by departing from thy Precepts, and from thy Judgments.

O Lord, Righteouſneſs belongeth unto thee; but unto us confuſion of face as at this day; to the Men of Judah, *and to the Inhabitants of* Jeruſalem, *becauſe we have ſinned againſt thee.*

But

But unto the Lord our God belongeth Mercy and Forgiveneſs, though we have rebelled againſt him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his Laws which he ſet before us.

O Lord, according to all thy Righteouſneſs, we beſeech thee, let thy anger and thy fury be turned away from thy City Jeruſalem, *thy holy Mountain. Becauſe for our ſins, and the iniquities of our Fathers,* Jeruſalem *and thy People are become a reproach to all that are about us.*

Now therefore, O God, hear the Prayer of thy Servants, and cauſe thy Face to ſhine upon thy Sanctuary.

O God incline thine ear and hear: Open thine Eyes, and behold the City which is called by thy Name.

O Lord hear. O Lord forgive. O Lord hearken and do. Defer not for thy own ſake, O our God. For thy City, and thy People, are called by thy Name.

And whilſt *Daniel* was thus praying, and confeſſing his ſins, and the ſins of his People unto the Lord, and ſupplicating for his City *Jeruſalem:* Behold the Angel *Gabriel* was ſent unto him from the Lord, with the glad tidings that God had heard his Prayer for *Jeruſalem*, and that it ſhould be built, and the Lord would dwell in it.

O may we all thus *fast* and *pray*, as *Daniel* did, and may God Almighty give us such a return of our Prayers, *Amen*, *O God for Jesus Christ his sake, to whom*, &c.

FINIS.

Books Written by the same Author, and Printed for Walter Kettilby, *at the Bishop's-Head in St.* Paul's *Church-Yard.*

A Discourse concerning Conscience; the first Part wherein an account is given of the Nature, and Rule, and Obligation of it. And the case of those who separate from the Communion of the Church of *England*, as by Law established, upon this pretence, that it is against their Conscience to join in it, is stated and discussed.

A discourse of Conscience: The second Part concerning a doubting Conscience.

A Fast-Sermon before the House of Commons *April* 11. 1679. on *Revel.* ii. 5.

The Duty and Happiness of doing good, in two Sermons, the former Preached at the *Yorkshire* Feast *Feb.* 17. 1679. on *Eccl.* xi. 1. the other before the Lord Mayor at the *Spittle*, *Apr.* 14. 1680. on 1 *Tim.* vi. 17, 18, 19.

A Sermon at the Election of the Lord Mayor *Sept.* 29. 1680. on *Psal.* cxii. 4.

A Lent-Sermon at *Whitehall*, *March* 20. 1684. on *Luke* xvi. 31.

A Sermon before the Queen at *Whitehall*, *Apr.* 1. 1690. on *Gal.* v. 13.